



United States Senator  
**Richard Shelby**  
REPORTS TO ALABAMA



## Putting Alabamians First

*By: Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL)*

Almost twenty years ago, I made a commitment to the citizens of Alabama to visit every county in the state each year to listen and learn about the issues most important to them. Since that time, I have held 1340 county meetings. These meetings have been essential to learn the thoughts and concerns of Alabamians across the state. On Monday, February 13th, I wrapped up my county visits, holding my 67<sup>th</sup> meeting since January 9<sup>th</sup> in Lawrence County, Alabama.

Over the years, these meetings have provided Alabamians an open forum to voice their concerns, frustrations, successes, suggestions and opinions on the activities of our government. This year was no different, providing all in attendance an opportunity to discuss the important issues facing our state and nation with me and fellow Alabamians.

This year, as in years past, a few issues dominated the discussions during these visits. In particular, Alabamians seemed to be most interested in the economy, immigration, transportation spending, the new Medicare Part D plan, and the ongoing War on Terror. While some of these issues are of national significance and others are specific to Alabama; hearing about them and learning the different views of citizens from across the state helps me better represent all Alabamians.

Like many Alabamians, I am watching the economy closely, and I believe that the economy is hot. Businesses are doing well, consumer spending remains strong and we are creating new jobs – throughout the country and more importantly, in Alabama. Today Alabama's unemployment rate is 3.5 percent, lower than the national average of 4.7 percent. During my visits around the state, I was encouraged by news of county's successes in recruiting new businesses and bringing new jobs to the county and surrounding areas. While there are still those counties who struggle with high unemployment levels, I believe that job creation in these areas is possible and it is a goal that we should all work together to achieve.

I believe that the tax cuts, passed in 2001 and 2003, are an essential component of the economic growth we are currently experiencing. This tax relief allows all Americans to keep more of their hard-earned money, while encouraging investment and allowing businesses to expand. I agree with the President that we must make these tax cuts permanent. If we do not, every American would

face a tax increase and we would run the risk of derailing our economic prosperity.

The exploding problem of immigration is an issue that troubled many Alabamians, and I share their concerns. I have long believed that our nation must have strong controls on the influx of illegal immigrants. I believe that the President's immigration proposal is headed in the wrong direction by, in essence, granting amnesty to illegal immigrants currently residing in the United States. Ours in a nation of laws and the President's proposal sends the wrong message to legal immigrants and those waiting patiently and following the law to come to the United States. The number of illegal immigrants crossing our borders unchecked each year is proof that our current system is broken and must be fixed. That is why I plan to vote for the strongest, most meaningful immigration reform that comes before the Senate.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and former Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, I have worked diligently to increase the amount of federal funding that Alabama receives to improve our roads and infrastructure. Today, Alabama receives more federal transportation dollars than ever before, and this funding is helping to spur economic growth throughout the state. I believe that investing in our transportation and infrastructure system is essential to Alabama's long-term vitality because it creates business opportunities, increases our competitiveness, and brings jobs to some of the state's most needy regions.

During my travels, people were quick to bring to my attention the issues they were encountering with the Medicare Part D program. Many of you have expressed frustration with the complexity of the program and difficulties in obtaining your benefits. In particular pharmacists have been overwhelmed by the problems that seniors have encountered and have taken on the role of mediator to ensure that seniors get the drugs they need.

I believe that that the goal of the program was an important one – to provide seniors with the first comprehensive drug benefit ever available under the Medicare program. Unfortunately, as many of you have rightfully pointed out, it has been plagued by problems. I believe that problems are to be expected with the implementation of any program as large as the prescription drug program. How-

ever, I also believe that we can and should work to address these issues to make the program as accessible and easy to understand as possible. I plan to continue to work with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to ensure that the remaining problems are fixed so that all eligible beneficiaries can receive the help they deserve in a timely and efficient manner. If we discover that the program continues to be plagued by problems, I believe that Congress action to ensure that seniors receive the drug benefit that was intended.

Finally, the topic of Iraq weighed heavily on the minds of Alabamians. I continue to believe removing Saddam Hussein's repressive regime from power was fundamental to our success in fighting the War on Terrorism. By destroying a sanctuary for terrorists, the Iraqi people are now able to construct a country based on a constitution that will ensure freedom. I believe a democratic Iraq is integral to attaining stability in the region and those trying to block the rise of democracy in Iraq cannot be allowed to win.

Over this past year, we have made steady progress: voter turnout has increased significantly in each of the three elections; over 214,000 Iraqi security forces have been trained and equipped, now outnumbering American and coalition forces; and we have captured 116 al Qaeda operatives. I am proud of the work our service members have done to accomplish these goals, and I am committed to providing them with the resources necessary to complete their mission. I remain steadfast in my belief that we must not cut and run. When the Iraqis are able to take on more of the fight, our troops will come home. As they stand up, we can stand down.

I extend my thoughts and prayers to those still serving in Iraq, their families here at home, and especially those who have lost loved ones defending our freedom in the War on Terrorism. Like all Americans, I readily await the day when our armed forces can return home from operations supporting the War on Terrorism.

During my travels across the state, many other issues were discussed, and I will keep the priorities of each county in mind. I look forward to starting off each year traveling the state and hearing from the people. I am honored to represent Alabama in the United States Senate, and I will continue to work in the best interest of our state and our nation.



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